

Human Aggression (Part 3)

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2.2 Social Learning Theory

This theory sees aggression as social learning. According to social learning theories in earlier studies, people acquire aggressive responses the same way they acquire other complex forms of social behavior which either by direct experience or by observing others. Social learning theory explains the acquisition of aggressive behaviors, via observational learning processes, and provides a useful set of concepts for understanding and describing the beliefs and expectations that guide social behavior (Bushman & Anderson, 2002).

The key concepts in social learning theory, regarding the development and change of expectations as well as how one construes the social world are particularly useful in understanding the acquisition of aggressive behaviors and in explaining instrumental aggression (Bushman & Anderson, 2002). For example, Patterson's work on family interactions and the development of antisocial behavior patterns relies heavily on this approach (Patterson, 1992).

Bandura suggest that people behave aggressively as a result of social learning. Regardless of whether in real life or through the television, seeing people engage in aggressive behavior provides models for social learning through imitation (Baumeister & Bushman, 2008). Seeing such behavior pay off encourages vicarious learning because people identify such actions as having instrumental value and store this learning for future similar situation. Bandura has also demonstrated that children pick up aggressive behavior faster from watching a film, although they did not necessarily show it immediately (Bushman & Anderson, 2002).

This theory argues does not accept that aggression is the naturally dominant response to frustration, but rather that aggression is largely a learned behavior. Adherents of this school point out both that there are many societies in which aggression is largely absent and that aggressive behavior will be imitated even when there is no frustrating stimulus (Dugan, 2004).

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